

RICHARD NOBLE

David C F Wright DMus

Richard Desmond Cunliffe Noble died on the 19 June, 2008. He was 78.

He had been my friend for 30 years.

His father was an Army officer and Dick was educated at Eton and Keble College, Oxford where he read history. He was an expert on British history.

For many years, he was the music librarian with the BBC and ran the classical record department of a large London store. In the 1960s, he went through a hippie style with long hair, a moustache and pointy beard.

He was an expert, in fact the expert, on many composers particularly Bax whom he knew. One year, Richard sent me Lewis Foreman's book on Bax and a long list of errors in the book with copies of letters from Bax to confirm what Richard said. I knew Aloys Fleischmann who confirmed the Foreman errors.

Mr Noble did the same with Michael Kennedy's books particularly the one on Walton which contained many glaring errors. The composer John Veale, who knew Walton, also found these errors and many more besides.

"The trouble is," said Richard, "that some people will believe these errors to be true!"

Richard was a stickler for the truth. And he was a honest man. He explained how he found Medtner to be a very strange man and so is his music he would add. He wanted Bach and early composers to be played on the harpsichord and not the piano. He adored the operas of Rameau but said that he often went to sleep in operas and, perhaps, missed the whole of the second act.

He always listened to first broadcast performances.

He wrote many articles about composers from Gesualdo to Wilhelm Pijper and edited magazines such as The Consort, the journal of the Dolmetsch Foundation and he was a keen supporter of the Haslemere Festival. He introduced me to the joys of Telemann. He wrote a fine article about Arthur Butterworth.

His records, CDs and cassettes were a massive collection and never catalogued. His spare bedroom in his house near Godalming was full of such items, including the bath, and the stairs had stacks of recordings in them. He had rare recordings from East Germany, Bulgaria and Russia and many from Japan.

I have Richard to thank for many recordings including pieces only broadcast once. He introduced me to William Wordsworth whom he knew well and my subsequent correspondence with Bill was fascinating.

Dick also knew the composer Ivor Walsworth and his pianist wife Joan Davies. Walsworth was not an organised man and one wonders where his scores are... but he was a connoisseur of good wines.

Richard and I had many things in common but neither of us were yes men. He found Elgar's music to be both tedious and torrid and the Second Symphony to be a disaster. He called it a disgrace to the British Empire. Like me, he also found Benjamin Britten to be utterly loathsome. Dick provided evidence of how Beecham would tart up Haydn symphonies with instrumental parts that were not in the scores.

On the most helpful things was that Richard had every copy of the Radio Times since 1951 and when people complained that the Controller of Radio Three, William Glock, prevented British composers who wrote in a tonal style having broadcasts, Richard could produce evidence to prove that this was totally wrong. Glock introduced very little avant garde music but felt that all types of music should be broadcast. (See my two articles about William Glock).

Richard was very keen on all types of music and copies of his recordings enriched my life. Because of him, I have all the Merlatin symphonies and music by other 'unknowns' and recordings of works which composers have withdrawn.

In his last years, he was troubled with an ulcerated leg and had two burglaries at his home which distressed him. He was also concerned that his local record shop might close. He became very tired and after parking his car in Godalming, collapsed and died.

When all the 'experts' could not answer a musical question, Richard could.

He will be missed

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